

United States v.
Taylor Huddleston

EXHIBIT 1
(Taylor
Huddleston's
Letter to the
Court)

Dear Judge O'Grady,

It's important to me that you know how sincerely remorseful I am about the circumstances I've put others and myself into. It haunts me knowing that innocent people were and likely still are being victimized because of my actions. I could have done more but didn't, and for that I shall gracefully accept whatever punishment you deem fit.

Net Seal

I never set out to hurt anyone or cause harm. I began developing Net Seal at around age 18 after someone suggested I should sell what was previously a licensing component I was prototyping. Taking their advice, I jumped in with both legs and taught myself a separate programming language (PHP) so that I could host the system as an online platform.

From the initial service I built a good reputation for myself and gained some loyal followers. It seemed appropriate that after I had advanced my skills extensively by age 21 that I should create a new and improved application – Net Seal 2.0 which superseded the original.

Over the next several years it became apparent to me that some of my customers were using Net Seal for their malware, but I remained complacent because it "wasn't my responsibility". I feel so stupid and ashamed for ever having that mentality. There were many times I wanted to shut the system down but I was so scared of letting my customers and friends down. I wish I had the strength then that I do now.

In a move to leave Hackforums I sold Net Seal in late 2016.

NanoCore

NanoCore came at a turbulent time in my life. My brother, girlfriend, uncle and I were all living with my mom when she told us she was engaged after just two months of seeing my now stepfather and said she was moving in with him. Without any place to live we all eventually migrated to their property. My uncle lived in a covered shed sleeping on the ground, my brother in a camper trailer, and my girlfriend and I in a run-down mobile home.

It was sometime in late 2013 that I spoke to this 17-year old who told me his remote administration tool was making \$200 / day in sales which was an order of a magnitude more than the \$15 / day I was making with Net Seal. At that moment I realized this could be my escape from poverty, maybe if I made my own tool I could make enough money to lift myself out of poverty.

Everything spiraled out of control so quickly which is when I should have simply shut the project down, it was reckless of me to use Hackforums as a launch pad. It wasn't long after releasing NanoCore that I began compromising my integrity, until I didn't even recognize myself anymore. The money certainly played a role, but I think the biggest factor was that people respected and looked up to me. They would request features for the tool and I'd accommodate them because the praise felt so good. Looking back, I realize how naïve I was.

I was making decent money so my family was proud of me, I had validation from my friends and peers. I wasn't just a 24-year old high school dropout with no prospects anymore, people took notice of these talents I had wasted my entire youth developing and I could support myself. It was a hard thing to let go of.

After about a year of this I couldn't do it anymore. I had lost the respect of the people who mattered to me, the ones who appreciated that I was so eager to teach and share with others, they took pride in being able to say they were my friends. I traded them out for these petty hackers who only appreciated what I could do to further enable them.

It made me sick and ashamed, I had never been so depressed and empty in my life so I made the decision to distance myself from NanoCore. Eventually I decided it was time to move on, no amount of money was worth it and I sold my stake in early 2016.

Closing

I spend a lot of time thinking about the kids who looked up to me as a role model and mentor whom I let down, and the employees who advocated for the use of my software in their ecosystems just to later discover my arrest and how poorly that must have reflected on them. I have forever damaged my reputation but more importantly it's something that will always

weigh on my conscience. I could have been a powerful force for good and I squandered the opportunity.

It would be easy for me to look at this scenario and simply give up but instead I choose to focus on the positivity I can still affect. I will continue to do everything in my power to not only right my wrongs, but also to assist the government in its continued fight against these bad actors. I genuinely believe I am a good person and I will do whatever I can to prove it.

This past year has easily been the hardest, most character building, and eye-opening time of my life. Prior to my legal troubles my world was so small and isolated, I was immature and perhaps even a bit arrogant. In a strange way, I am somewhat grateful for everything that has transpired. From my psychological evaluation, I've learned that I have autism and social anxiety disorder. Also, I've met so many amazing people that have really impacted my outlook on life. I'm finally at a point in which I do consider myself an adult and have overall gained a great deal of self-confidence. I feel as if though my journey through life has been corrected and I have a future to look forward to now.

Moving forward I hope to continue my carpentry apprenticeship. I work with two older gentleman whom despite knowing of my legal obstacles and have taken me under their wings and are teaching me the trade of cabinetry. It's hard work but very rewarding, much in the same way programming was.

I am grateful for everything you've already done for me Judge O'Grady and I can appreciate the difficult position myself and others put you in daily, I know it can't be easy to make the decisions you have to. I beg you to please consider leniency in my case. I know that I have a bright future and I'm anxious to get started if given a second chance. I want you, my lawyers, probation officer, and everyone else whose put their faith in me to see what I can accomplish and to be proud at what I become. I want to be the reason all of you can reflect back and remember why you do the jobs that you do.

Sincerely,

Taylor Huddleston
Taylor Huddleston